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**Children's Committee**  
**Testimony of Jillian Gilchrest, Early Care and Education Policy Analyst**  
**Connecticut Association for Human Services**  
**RE: SB 273, An Act Concerning the Care4Kids Program**  
**March 6, 2012**

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you in support of SB 273, An Act Concerning the Care4Kids Program. I am Jillian Gilchrest, the Early Care and Education Policy Analyst for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS).

Founded in 1910, CAHS promotes family economic security strategies that empower low-income working families to achieve financial independence. In my role at CAHS, I host the Providers' Caucus. The Caucus serves as a forum for providers-- center-based and family childcare, publicly and privately funded-- to develop a well-informed voice and become equipped to participate in early care and education policy dialogue. CAHS is also a member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership and advocacy organization committed to improving the developmental outcomes for all children, birth to 8, in the areas of early learning, health, safety and economic security.

CAHS supports SB 273, An Act Concerning the Care4Kids Program. The Care4Kids program is a vital support for working parents in Connecticut, in 2011 serving more than 21,000 children Birth-School age in Connecticut. In addition to granting some of Connecticut's most at-risk families the opportunity to work, Care4Kids also serves as a revenue stream for childcare providers, center-based, family-based and kith and kin.

**Eligibility Expansion for Minor Parents**

Current statute says that if a minor parent lives with their parent, their parents income is taken into account when determining program eligibility. For already financially fragile families, a teen pregnancy can cause many additional stressors. Although Connecticut's teen birth rate has decreased in recent years, there are close to 20 communities, whose rate exceeds that of the state average, including major cities, suburban towns and rural communities.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, only 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by age 22. By allowing all of Connecticut's minor parents to access Care4Kids, we are giving these young women a chance to finish their education and are taking a huge step forward

toward lessening CT's achievement gap. A high school diploma positively impacts both the life of that teen and that teen's child.

### **Coverage Extension for Women on Maternity Leave**

SB 273 also addresses maternity leave, allowing a recipient of Care4Kids up to 12 weeks of program eligibility during unpaid leave. Currently, when a woman takes leave because her doctor recommends bed rest or to care for a newborn, her Care4Kids is suspended. Seeing as 70% of all low-income workers have two or fewer weeks of sick and vacation time and the majority of low-income families do not qualify for FMLA, we are not talking about a long length of maternity leave.

And for such a short amount of leave, the negative impacts of the current policy on both the child and child care provider is so large and must be addressed. Currently, when a mother takes maternity leave, her older child must leave their childcare program, disrupting their routine during a time of already heightened change brought on by having a new sibling. Additionally, the childcare provider, who now has an open slot cannot financially afford to hold that slot open until that child returns, meaning the childcare provider is in a scramble and that the mother may need to look for alternative care once she returns to work. Finally, a mother must be physically back at work before she can reapply for Care4Kids, which can take multiple weeks time to begin receiving care4kids again. This can lead to job loss and unpaid childcare.

### **Phased-in Increase in Provider Reimbursement Rates**

Connecticut is one of three states that have not raised Care4kids rates since 2002. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 20 of the 821 occupations reported have lower average wages than child care workers. Having spoken with many childcare providers throughout Connecticut, family and center based, many of our providers themselves qualify for care4kids. As we continue to discuss increased quality in early care and education, we need to ensure that we increase the salaries of our childcare workforce.

### **Coverage Extension for Unemployed Parents**

In 2010, 64 percent of Connecticut's unemployed workers were out of work for 15 weeks or more, and half of all unemployed workers were looking for work for 27 weeks or longer. We support this bills extension of program eligibility to 6 months for parents actively seeking a new job as it reflects today's challenging job market and economy.